8: Murphy & Steward E-5 (1952-1953) 1956
SQ13 Mundurucu SQ13
Montagnais M46

M4 178 621
M4 [578]

to the disorganization of Curuá River society. The political authority of appointed "chiefs" was now a means of extending the influence of the whites. The continuing migration of young men from the remaining primitive villages of the savannahs caused an oversupply of men on the Curuá River, and conflicts over women became rife. Owing to the endless squabbles in villages which had lost their aboriginal basis of integration, dissidents moved off to live at their rubber avenues or formed new and smaller villages. This fission process is still going on. Concomitantly, the Mission and the Indian Post are becoming more important as focal points in a new mode of integration of the Mundurucu. Over one-third of the Curuá River population make their rainy season homes at these agencies, which serve as centers of trade and of social and religious gatherings. It is from the Post and Mission, also, that the lines of authority now radiate.

M4 M6 177 171 457 452

19. Comparative Summary

The accompanying table and chart present the major phases of acculturation in summary form, as abstracted from the historical continua. The basic acculturative factors in both cases exerted parallel influences, although the two societies were substantively different until the final culmination was reached. There were four causal factors common to each. First, both became involved in a mercantile, barter economy in which the collector of wild products was tied by bonds of debt and credit to particular merchants. Such involvement also occurred widely among native peoples who produced crops or livestock. This arrangement must be distinguished from cash transactions, in which, owing to the impersonality of money as a medium of exchange, the primary producer has greater freedom of choice as to with whom he will deal. In a pure credit-barter economy, all transactions are based on a personal relationship between the principals; the merchant must be able to rely upon the continued patronage of the primary producer whereby the latter liquidates past debts while assuming new ones. It seems to be a basic procedure that the pre-literate Indian is kept in debt by the trader. While the latter can manipulate accounts at will, and no doubt is frequently guilty of malfeasance, he usually allows the Indian to run beyond his means. The debtor-producer is selling his future production, and the creditor will not extend payment unless assured of delivery. Where such an economy is found, it is common for merchants to refuse to deal with primary producers who are in debt to another merchant. This is a "gentleman's agreement" in the Amazon, although it is frequently violated by wandering traders. Second, the growing lines of dependency upon the traders are at the expense of collective bonds within the respective societies. Reliance upon individuals and institutions outside the native social system are intensified by a steady increase in demand and need for manufactured goods. This, as we have seen, goes beyond the mere initial allure of Western tools and ornaments. Luxuries soon become necessities--a process that can be found in our own culture. Third, while crude latex and animal furs are very unlike articles, they imply a common cultural-ecological adaptation. Both are natural products having a reliable occurrence in worthwhile quantity within an area which can be most efficiently exploited by one man. Both require conservation, for careless exploitation can seriously reduce the number of furbearing animals, or render rubber trees worthless. The producer has an incentive to maintain the productivity of his resources. Finally, both rubber trees and fur animals are sufficiently dispersed to require that persons exploiting them live or work at some distance from one another.

M4 M6 171 177 458 [439] M4 M6 [453]

These factors of change were essentially the same among both Mundurucú and Montagnais, and they were introduced through contact with the outside world. Their initial efforts upon the aboriginal cultures were somewhat dissimilar, owing to aboriginal differences between the two groups. Whereas the Mundurucú chief served at first as intermediary with the trader, this seems not to have been true of the Montagnais chief. Montagnais family heads, however, traded on behalf of their camp. For a short time, this pattern was followed by many

[text continues on p. 349]

M4 M6 171 177 458 622

12:Murphy E-5 (1952-1953) 1960
SQ13 Mundurucu SQ13

said, "Because it is beautiful there." Caetano recovered, and the unpopular Bibói returned to Cabitutú.

Today, the role of the chief as intermediary for his village with the traders is a fiction. The intricate trading system of Cabruá will be discussed below, but it must be mentioned here that the traders weigh each man's rubber production separately and give him his own credit, and each person's purchases are also separately charged to his own account. But all transactions are conducted in the presence of the chief, and he voices his followers' requirements of merchandise. Since it is convenient to the interests of the traders that the people feel they owe to the chief, the latter is charged with the combined accounts of his followers, and he is therefore expected to encourage their productivity. Despite this ruse, persons who are deeply in debt are refused further credit while those with only a small debt or a credit are given merchandise. The fiction of the chief's position is partly maintained, however, which tends to integrate his body of immediate followers. But the people understand, however imperfectly, that their fortunes and those of the chief are not identical and that the hard worker receives goods while the shirker does not, no matter how much the chief is said to owe.

The ultimate effect of trade probably will be to individualize commercial transactions further, and the office of chief will then lose almost all function. Its contemporary weakness, combined with the factionalism latent in the creation of patrilineages in a matrilocal society, have made it the center of controversy. However, the chieftaincy continues to symbolize the identity of the village, and, despite its stormy aspects, the decline of the institution is directly related to the progressive disorganization of village life.